

The Phony War 2002

How the West Through Their Unwisdom, Carelessness, and
Good Nature Allowed the Wicked to Rearm

by J. Noel Williams

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In 1939, after France and England had declared war on Germany, U.S. newspapers described the period of desultory military activity as the Phony War. In England it was known as the Twilight War, and in Germany, Sitzkrieg. We are today, engaged in just such a phony war.

This is an analogy worthy of our consideration, for just as in the early stages of World War II when opportunities were missed that, in the ensuing years, would cost millions of casualties, so to now are we foregoing opportunities that could save American lives in the future.

Churchill proposed calling World War II, "The Unnecessary War." And so it was. The Allies could have stopped Hitler from re-arming in 1933-34 - an activity clearly proscribed by the Peace Treaty. They missed another opportunity in 1935 when Hitler re-introduced conscription in violation of the Locarno Pact.

Throughout the 1930's, the militaries of France and Britain were vastly superior to Germany's. Ironically, perhaps because of this overwhelming superiority and the hubris it engendered, coupled with the recognition that Germany's military elite itself understood Germany's own deficiencies, the Western democracies failed to act decisively. The threat was sufficiently diffuse, and the necessary remedies too painful to undertake.

Unfortunately, this is precisely the state of affairs we are presented with today as we pursue our own phony war. Rational calculations by Western governments and their intellectual elites clearly recognize the tremendous disparities between Western military capabilities and those of our Eastern adversaries. European governments in particular, see no reason to tackle the inconvenient and messy activities necessary to thwart

development of weapons of mass effects (WME), despite the fact that these capabilities have the very real potential of blossoming into the essential facilitators for the first World War of this millennium.

As William Shirer wrote, Britain and France had the military capabilities to halt Hitler, but “their supine, dreadfully mediocre governments lacked the will and the wisdom to do so.” Given the clear historical record of World War II, it would be a tragic mistake for us to again assume our strong military is sufficient insurance against an emergent ideological threat such as radical fundamentalist Islam.

Failure to understand the nature of the threat in the early stages of World War II directly affected the ultimate ferocity and scope of the war. German military ascendancy was not the true threat in the 1930’s, it was Nazism. Emboldened and empowered by an unflagging ideology, the Nazis harnessed Germany’s military for their devices. Failure by the Allies to comprehend that they were not confronting a rational Westphalian nation-state was a costly mistake. Nazism was what made Germany so difficult to counter, and failure to understand the implications of this is why the received wisdom of the day was so unwise – so very wrong.

Through rational calculation it stood to reason that Germany could be managed. When today’s technology in modeling and simulation is applied to the military scenario in 1940, the computer proclaims the Allies as the winners. Yet, in May 1940 France was overrun and crushed by Nazi Germany.

Modeling and simulation fails to predict the true outcome in 1940 because it is unable to contemplate the fact that France failed to recognize the true nature of the threat confronting it. This failure to understand the nature of the threat, coupled with the

complacency engendered by their military superiority, lead the French to ignominious defeat – not rational victory.

Today, we face a matrix of national and sub-national threats bound together by covalent ideology bent on the destruction of the Western political and economic system. As an example, the most recent escalation in the Arab-Israeli conflict should be viewed not as an isolated event, but rather as a second front endorsed and abetted by Saddam Hussein to deflect pressure and buy time against a presumed Western attack on Iraq. His support of suicide bombers through cash contributions to their families is analogous to German support of the Austrian Nazi party. It is all part of a broader tapestry of competition and conflict.

The lull in terrorist activities after 9/11 is also from a chapter in the Nazi playbook. During 1939, Hitler directed Admiral Raeder to curtail sea engagements because “France and Britain were showing signs of political and military constraint.” In 1939 the German battleships were returned to their waiting stations; in 2002, the bombers in the U.S. lay in wait.

Military historians now recognize the deleterious effects of the phony war on the French military. It led to weakened morale and the mental unpreparedness of the French military, thus materially affecting the nature and extent of the coming war.

The western militaries are likewise being lulled into complacency today. The phony war analogy is compelling because the fundamental issue facing the West today is failure to understand and articulate the true nature of the threat. Just as France and England mistakenly assumed they were dealing with a rational nation-state, we are mistaken in assuming terrorism is the threat.

Terrorism cannot and will not defeat the West. However, terrorism as the tool of an evil and destructive ideology is another matter. Just as Blitzkrieg was an effective method of warfare, so today is terrorism.

Attacking symptoms and not causes will ensure our defeat regardless of our military superiority in exactly the same way the French were defeated in May 1940.

In referring to Prime Minister Chamberlain's background as a businessman growing sisal in the Caribbean, Churchill said, "What a pity Hitler did not know when he met the sober English politician with his umbrella at Berchesgaden, Godesberg, and Munich, that he was actually talking to a hard-bitten pioneer from the outer marches of the British Empire!"

We must hope for a similar understanding from Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden about a President hailing from the outer marches of our Nation. There is room for optimism after all, while President Bush calls it a war on terrorism, he knows implicitly that it is really a war against evil.